

East Carolina University
Request to Plan a Doctoral Program in Health Psychology

Introduction

East Carolina University requests approval to plan a doctoral program in Health Psychology (CIP: 42.9999). [UNCC has also requested approval for planning a doctoral program in Health Psychology.]

Program Description

The Department of Psychology is proposing a PhD program in health psychology. Health psychology is the educational, scientific, and professional contribution of psychology to:

- understanding the etiology, promotion, and maintenance of health;
- the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of physical and mental illness;
- the study of psychological, social, emotional, and behavioral factors in physical and mental illness; and
- the improvement of the health care system and formulation of health policy.

Health psychology is a recognized area of study within professional psychology. Practitioners in this specialty area are represented by the Health Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association (Division 38), which supports the journal *Health Psychology*, The Society of Pediatric Psychology (Division 54) which publishes the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, and the School Psychology Division (Division 16) which supports the publication of the journal *School Psychology Quarterly*. The National Association of School Psychologists, publisher of *School Psychology Review*, also represents pediatric school psychologists. Similar divisions or sections that are devoted to the study of health psychology exist in Canada (Canadian Psychological Association) and in Europe (European Health Psychology Society). A variety of research funding and training grant opportunities exist through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other government and private foundations. Many other professional organizations and scientific journals are dedicated to the study of health psychology.

The proposed program in health psychology will adopt a biopsychosocial approach to understanding physical and behavioral health and illness. The philosophy of training will be built on the scientist-practitioner model, which calls for psychologists to be trained as both scientists (competent to engage in scientific inquiry) and practitioners (competent to provide clinical services). The proposed program in health psychology does not neglect the importance of traditional medical approaches to the study, understanding, and treatment of disease and illness. Rather, the program will serve a complementary function in that it takes a broader viewpoint of etiological factors and their interactions, thus providing a broader base of treatment. McDaniel et al. note that primary care psychologists “bring systematic research training and advanced clinical training; they often become the program developers and evaluators and clinical innovators in their settings. Many primary care psychologists rise to administrative and other positions of leadership and become valued consultants to other leaders because of their understanding of systems, relationships, and behavior.”

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Students who complete the proposed PhD in health psychology will be prepared for a number of practitioner, faculty, and research roles within various health care and academic settings. For example, more than one half of health psychologists provide clinical services as part of their duties. These individuals are often employed in primary care programs, inpatient medical units and specialized health care programs, and they work with many different health care professionals (e.g., physicians, dentists, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, physical and occupational therapists). Research-focused health psychologists are interested in the etiology of illness (e.g., interaction of complex psychosocial and biological factors), efficacy of methods of health promotion, and the effectiveness of various coping strategies in response to psychosocial stressors, pain, physical and cognitive limitations, and serious health problems.

Building on the existing strengths and resources of the Department of Psychology, the health psychology program will consist of two concentrations: Behavioral medicine/primary care and pediatric school psychology. Each concentration would admit six students per year following a start-up period.

Program Review

The review process for requests to plan is designed to determine if the proposal is developed to the stage appropriate for taking to the Graduate Council and if so what are the issues that may need further attention. Proposals to plan doctoral programs are reviewed internally. The concerns from the reviewers were summarized in a letter to the Chancellor prior to the presentation to the Graduate Council. That summary follows:

It has been reviewed internally with positive results but with some concerns expressed by the reviewers. The primary reviewer concern centers on the difficulties of projecting demand for new degree areas, and whether graduates of such programs will be readily accepted over graduates of more traditional programs such as clinical psychology. Attention is given to this but it will need additional attention as the program is developed.

Graduate Council

The Graduate Council had, as a basis for its consideration, ECU's proposal to plan the program in Health Psychology, the summary letter to the Chancellor, and a presentation to the Council by representatives of the program. In addition to the issues raised previously, the following concerns were expressed by Council members: whether there would be overlap with the clinical psychology program at UNCG, whether there was too much course work for the program and whether there would be enough demand to support two new programs.

Response

The representatives from ECU responded that the focus of the UNCG program was mental health so there would not be much overlap with the proposed ECU program and UNCG has approximately 300 applicants for each graduate slot in the doctoral program in psychology. The number of hours stated were beyond the master's degree so it was a

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more reasonable number. The representatives made the point that there was not much overlap between the UNCC and the ECU programs.

Need for the Program

There are currently three doctoral programs in the state, but it was agreed there was heavy demand for all psychology doctoral programs. The Council discussion indicated there was strong support for the need for additional training in psychology in the state. An issue was raised about the extent to which a joint program between the two schools (ECU and UNCC) might be considered. Each school thought it would not be feasible based on the difference in the programs and the high demand for training in the field.

Recommendation by the Graduate Council

After consideration of the issues raised by previous reviewers and Council members, the Graduate Council voted, without dissent, to recommend approval for ECU to plan a doctoral program in Health Psychology.

Additional Review

The Office of the President, in light of two proposals for planning a Ph.D. in Health Psychology, decided it would be wise to seek outside advice. A reviewer was asked to review and compare the two proposals and respond to a set of questions: Those questions were:

1. Is it feasible and wise to establish a psychology program with a focus on health?
2. How similar or dissimilar are the two proposals? That is, to what extent do they overlap?
3. What would be the source of students for each program, and what would be the typical placement of graduates? To what extent would they be in competition for students and placements? What is the pool of students for these programs, and what are the employment opportunities for graduates?
4. At this stage of development, how would you rate the overall quality of the proposals and the contemplated programs each seeks to develop?

The reviewer confirms that Health Psychology is a recognized and established field and that health care in psychology now extend beyond mental health to include “behavioral health,” and that both proposals capture the need and opportunity for such programs. The reviewer, in regard to the overlap question, states, “While the topic of ‘health psychology’ is in both programmatic names and descriptions, they appear to have significantly different foci beyond the core of clinical (psychology) training and research and core health psychology training.” The reviewer thinks there will be demand for these programs and the opportunities for employment will be adequate to accommodate the graduates of their programs. But the focus on pediatric school psychology may need some additional attention to determine how it fits with the current field. The reviewer concluded with, “I think each University has done a good job outlining the trends and programmatic goals for these two ‘health psychology’ programs as well as making the case for student interest and high employability of graduates.”

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Issues to Address in Planning

Each program will need to consult with the other as planning takes place. The reviewer also suggested that there needs to be careful attention to which areas each will seek accreditation in and that there be prior consultation with accreditation agencies as the programs are planned.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve the request from East Carolina University to plan a doctoral program in Health Psychology.

Approved to be Recommended for Planning to the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs

Senior Vice President Gretchen M. Bataille

August 31, 2004